



THE HOUSE

By FOXCROFT DAVIS

BEHOLD the House of Representatives of the people of the United States, the great Demos, the source of all power, the basis upon which the great superstructure of the Government rests, which dates back to the Magna Charta, and whose immediate ancestor was the first Parliament of Henry IV. in the fifteenth century! In Henry's Parliament, the representatives of the people established finally and forever that all revenue bills must originate in the lower house, which should hold the purse of the people, and without which not a wheel in the legislative, the executive, or the judicial branch of the Government could turn.

It is because of this Parliament that there is no Ways and Means Committee in the Senate, and that when any treaty or commercial arrangement or anything involving the payment of money is introduced, any appointment or legislation is proposed, the House of Representatives raises its mighty hand, and settles the matter according to the will of the people through their representatives. For it can defeat any measure or any person, by merely declining to appropriate the money necessary to pay for that measure or person.

When this great Committee on Ways and Means presents its business to the House of Representatives, and the House goes into Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union, the assemblage at once resolves itself into a body as absolutely democratic as the Saxon Witenagemot or the New England town meeting. Every symbol of a popular assemblage is religiously observed. The Speaker leaves the chair, and a chairman is elected who is not the Speaker. Not even so much as the prestige of the regular presiding officer is allowed to hamper the freedom of debate. The Speaker goes down to the floor, and has no more privileges than the newest or most obscure member of the House.

THE mace, the emblem of authority, is put under the Speaker's table, to show that the House deliberates without interference from anybody. The mace is really a weapon, a stout wooden stick with a metal head, and used to be the favorite weapon of fighting priests of the Middle Ages. They were forbidden by ecclesiastical law to use swords; but got around the law by using the mace, a terrible weapon, against the armored men of the time. In the choice of the mace as the type of authority, the idea of democracy was rigidly carried out. In the early days only a few men out of the whole were authorized to wear swords; but any and all of the people could use a good, stout stick, and so the weapon of their Majesties the People was chosen. When the Speaker presides, and any members show signs of indulging in fist-cuffs and will not obey the Speaker's gavel, the Sergeant at Arms or his deputy is directed to "show the mace." That functionary seizes the mace and marches up to the offending members, who are supposed to be awed into good behavior at sight of this big stick.

Not long ago, when two members got into a row, and it seemed as if blows were about to be exchanged, Speaker Cannon promptly ordered the Sergeant at Arms to show them the mace. The Sergeant took the mace, marched up to the two belligerents, and stood, mace in hand, majestically before them. This, however, had not the slightest effect, and the Sergeant at Arms anxiously inquired of a member sitting next, "What am I to do with the mace now?"

To which the member responded in a stage whisper, "Peck 'em on the head with it!"

This brought down the House, and a roar of laughter and applause followed, in which even the belligerents were obliged to join.

In general, however, before the mace can be shown, the members rush in and separate men whose tempers have got the better of them, who have exchanged the lie or the blow that always follows. Members engaging in these rows are always called before the bar of the House and sternly reprimanded by the Speaker, who talks like a Dutch uncle to them and calls them by name. This "naming" is the only time a member's name is used in debate. He is at other times "the member from So and So," or "the gentleman from So and So."

These collisions rarely, if ever, occur between members anywhere except on the floor of the House. Everything is permitted in the freedom of debate, nor is a member held accountable outside for anything he may say on the floor. Through this freedom of speech, members say things they would not dare to utter elsewhere. In the old days duels followed the exchange of the lie, and the Graves-Cilley duel, the John Randolph and Henry Clay duel, and many historical encounters

took place. But in the evolution of government the principle became firmly fixed that there must be absolute freedom of debate, and that no man could be held responsible outside for anything said on the floor of either House; and so the dueling practice was dropped in Congress long before public sentiment abolished it elsewhere. No libel suit holds for anything said in open debate, and in every way the freedom of speech is jealously guarded and maintained.

THERE are no secret sessions of the lower House, the business of the people being transacted in the presence of the people.

Great galleries line the House like those of the Senate Chamber, and are reserved for the same purpose,—the public galleries, the Speaker's gallery, the members' gallery, the diplomatic gallery, and the press gallery. The press guards its rights as jealously as the House keeps watch over its liberty. The press gallery is the only place sacred from the surging and encroaching public on momentous occasions when the masses in the vast corridors of the Capitol have overflowed the galleries, and have even been admitted to the floor of the House. The press gallery, which tells the people what their Representatives are doing, remains inviolate. Once only was an attempt made during the closing hours of Congress, when the crush was immense, to admit women into the press gallery. The Speaker gave the order; but it was promptly resisted, and a contest inaugurated between the representatives of the press gallery and the Speaker, which resulted in the Speaker's retirement to private life for a long time.

The great Hall of the House in the south wing of the Capitol presents the same scene of solid splendor as in the Senate wing on the north side. In it is a similar magnificent roof of stained glass, rich carpets, noble fireplaces, and luxurious cloakrooms; but there the resemblance ends.

The House presents a scene of constant activity, and instead of the ninety-two dignified and generally elderly Senators, the House has now a membership of three hundred and ninety-one. This does not include Senators and Representatives from the new States of Arizona and New Mexico, nor the territorial delegates, of which the most noticeable is the Hawaiian delegate, whose legal and accepted name is Prince Cupid, of the late royal house of Hawaii.

At present the Hall of the House, although much larger, has the same furnishings and equipment as the Senate Chamber, with its huge semicircle of mahogany desks and chairs. This, however, will be changed in a few months in order to accommodate the addition of more than forty members, due to the increased representation shown by the last census. The desks and chairs will be removed, and will be replaced by benches, as in the British Houses of Parliament. Every Representative will have his numbered seat, and on the bench before him will be a small shelf to hold books and papers. The arrangement is not nearly so comfortable and agreeable as the present one of desks and chairs; but the increase in membership makes the change necessary. The resemblance to the Senate, however, ceases with the inanimate things.

There is a great deal of coltishness in the House, and the Speaker, on his dais, must be able to wield the gavel vigorously and often. The amenities of debate are not so much observed as in the Senate, and much greater tartness of language is permitted; nor is it often that a session passes without a personal encounter on the floor of the House. This, although recognized as an impropriety, is by no means so serious as the same thing occurring in the Senate.

THE House meets usually at eleven o'clock, and in general presents a lively scene. The pages, of whom there are many more than in the Senate, are kept gaily on the trot, and the presiding officer, whether he be the Speaker, or the Speaker pro tem., or a chairman, has his work cut out for him.

Bills are introduced by thousands, of which only comparatively few can possibly pass. When the great appropriation bills come up they have the right of way, and the track is cleared for them. As in the Senate, tariff legislation is the hardest, and it is an old superstition that the father of a tariff bill is generally killed by his offspring. It is generally thought that President McKinley would have survived his wound but that his constitution had been fatally impaired by his labors on the McKinley tariff bill. William L. Wilson did not survive the Wilson tariff bill many years, nor did Nelson Dingley

of Maine live to see the Dingley tariff in operation for long. All tariff bills are leaps in the dark, and nobody knows how the arrangement will turn out until it is accomplished. There is a point in every duty upon every article imported into the United States at which importations will stop and the country begin to manufacture for itself. To find this elusive point is the terrible task set before tariff makers. The exception to this superstition that a tariff bill is a killer, is the late Senator Morrill of Vermont. As a Representative, Senator Morrill engineered the great war tariff that carried the United States through the Civil War, paying its way as it went along. Senator Morrill lived to be eighty-eight.

The House usually sits until five, but often much later, and there are frequent night sessions.

Part of every Representative's time and eloquence is conscientiously given to buncombe. The history of this phrase is that in the early days a Representative from Buncombe County, North Carolina, got up and proceeded to make a long speech about something in which the House had neither interest nor business. The member was called to order by another member on the ground that the speech was not germane to the question. This the North Carolina member frankly admitted, saying, "I know it; but I am talking for Buncombe County, North Carolina."

The House was so charmed with this apt name for a common practice that "buncombe" became incorporated into the American language. A good deal of talking for buncombe is still indulged in by astute Representatives.

TOWARD the close of Congress, when business becomes pressing and the House and Senate engage in fierce conflicts over appropriations, night sessions are often called. The Speaker issues warrants for the arrest of members, who are brought before the bar and sternly interrogated as to why they are not in the House attending to their business. When the social season is in full swing, the deputy Sergeants at Arms know well enough where to corral their men, who are generally dining out. Many Washington dinners and receptions have been invaded by officers of the House with warrants for the arrest of members, who are compelled to go.

The excuses given when they are arraigned before the bar of the House are of a varied character. A Representative will plead that he was attending the bedside of an invalid friend; when another Representative, who has been toiling and moiling during the evening, will call attention to the fact that the Representative is in evening dress and has a flower in his buttonhole. Another will explain with deep pathos that he was writing letters to his absent family, and became so absorbed that he forgot the flight of time. Then he is much embarrassed by a fellow Representative asking what was the limit of the game. Each and everyone is entirely innocent of any desire to shirk his duties, and is ready to sit at his desk attending to the public business until he drops dead. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of absenteeism. There is an obsolete law that members may be deprived of their pay for the days they are not in attendance at the House; but, although the party whips occasionally threaten to enforce this law, it is too much in the nature of a boomerang to be popular.

THE officers of the House are given considerable powers, and sometimes it turns their heads. The celebrated expression, "A bigger man than old Grant," came from a Texan deputy Sergeant at Arms in President Grant's administration. The deputy Sergeant, exulting in his magnificence as mace bearer, wrote of his glory to a friend in Texas, saying, "I am a bigger man than old Grant." By some means the letter became public, and the expression became classic. But in addition to the deputy Sergeant at Arms being "a bigger man than old Grant," he went on to say that he received very marked attentions not only from the Speaker, but from Mrs. Kerr, the Speaker's wife, a woman of the utmost dignity and propriety. This was more than Speaker Kerr could stand; so the deputy Sergeant was promptly retired to private life.

His famous phrase, however, remains as a component part of the American language, like another immortal Texan, Webster Flanagan, who, in a Republican National Convention, when a speaker declared they were not there for the sake of the offices, inquired, "Then what are we here for?"

Another favorite phrase in the House of Representatives is that of Tom Watson of Georgia. The proceedings on a bill having got into a parliamentary tangle, Mr. Watson shouted, "Mr. Speaker, where are we at?"

The only qualification specified for a Representative is that he shall be twenty-five years of age, and shall have been a citizen for at least seven years, and shall be an inhabitant of the State he represents. In this too is the idea of popular representation strictly observed. A constituency might send Judas Iscariot to Congress, if it wanted to—and Judas were living.

Notwithstanding that the qualifications are so few and simple for the election of a Representative, the House may purge itself, and a seat may be declared vacant where corruption is proved. It was a burning question whether a man who had been convicted of crime and had served a term in jail could be legally

